

Deidre of the Sorrows

Spoken: This is the tale of the first woman to bear the name of Deidre, which means "trouble" in the Gaelic tongue, for it was foretold at her birth that she would bring sorrow unto the King's house, and Death and Destruction to his band of men, the Red Branch. It is part of the oldest of the Irish mythologies of CuChullain and the Cattle Raid of Cuilaigh. So hear now her story...

1

On the day the great King Conchobar was feasting in my father's hall ,
My mother gave me birth and I was brought before the king.
And he pledged that when I came of age, that he would take me for his wife,
Though druid Cathbad prophesied that I would sorrow bring
 Three men will vie for my hand and my love
 Three men will vie for me
 The first like a father, and the next like a lover,
 And the third like as death to me.

2

Then the warriors of the King's Red Branch demanded I be put to death,
And forced the King to hide me, in a far secluded place.
So I grew into a woman, midst the forests and the woodland streams,
And came to have no rival, in beauty or in grace.
 Three crowns I wore on the day that I was wed
 Three chains to bind me tight.
 The crown of the country, and the coronet golden
 And the man who slept by me at night.

3

Came a day that I was walking in the meadow of my childhood home
I chanced upon a forester, as he a calf did slay
And a raven black as midnight swooped down right beside and drank its fill
As scarlet did the blood flow, where on the snow it lay.
 Three times I've seen such a man in my dreams
 Three times he's called to me.
 His hair black as midnight, and his face pale as snow-bright,
 and his lips red as blood could be.

4

Then did Lavarcham, my lady-in-waiting, spoke and said "I know this man,
His name is call-ed Noisi (Neeshi), he is Usnagh's (Ush-na) youngest son
Then my heart became unquiet, and I found no rest til I beheld him
In my husband's court, alas,(pause) and knew my heart was won.
 Three years we fled from the vengeance of the King
 Three years we ran so free.

And we roamed through the heather, and we lay there together,
Ne'er I knew that such happiness could be.

5

Thus we dwelt in bonnie Scotland, in a cottage with his brothers twain
Twas Ardan proud, and Ainnle (In-al) fair, and my beloved, and me.
Til came Fergus as King's envoy, to request us to return to court
Safe-conduct did he promise us, but I feared treachery.

Three times I begged him remain where we were,
Three times I said them nay,
But the voice of a woman bears no weight in their counsels,
And I could not persuade them to stay

6 (optional - adapted from one of the ancient poems)

Farewell to thee, Glen Urchain, and farewell to thee Glen da Ruadh,
and fare thee well Glen Massan, where the mountains touch the shore
Farewell to thee, Glen Etive, and fare well to Inis Draighen (Droyen)
For much did I misgive that I would see thee evermore.

Three boats there were that sailed back to Ireland fair
Three ships upon the sea.
In the first noble Fergus, next were Ardan and Ainnle
In the last were my true love and me.

7

We were met upon the shoreline by the warriors of the King's Red Branch
Who offered hospitality to Fergus and his son.
And since he was under geas he could not refuse to bide with them;
So came they on us in the night, and slaughtered everyone.

Three sons of Usnagh died fighting for their lives
Three brothers brave and true
And the son of great Fergus died defending my Noisi
Eoghan's spearpoint ran both of them through.

8

My hands were bound before me, and they dragged me back unto the King
And there I pined in sorrow for a year and for a day.
Not of meat or drink would I take fill, nor lift my head from off my knee
"What do you see that you so hate?" the King asked in dismay.

"Three men there are that I hate above the rest
Three men who've brung me despair.
For tis you, trait'rous husband, and the druid that cursed me
And cruel Eoghan who slew Noisi fair."

9

"Then by your own words shall you be given unto Eoghan as his wife".
Thus spoke the King in anger for my grief and for my woe
But I vowed to have no other lord so as we rode upon the shore
I leapt from Eoghan's chariot down to the rocks below.
 Three men had vied for my hand and my love
 Three men had vied for me
 First the King, my foster father, and the next my one true lover
 And Cruel Eoghan brought death unto me.

Spoken: And Fergus and many of the warriors were angered at the slaughter of the sons of Usnagh and the death of Deidre, and of Fergus' son. So they deserted the King, to join with his great rival, Queen Mebh.(Mev) And so it came to pass that comrade fought against former comrade in battle, and the Red Branch was sundered, and the prophecy fulfilled, that had been foretold at Deidre's birth.

Footnote: I have included some pronunciations. Also remember that "ch" is the hard sound as in the German ich, not soft as in change - see in Lavarcham and Urchain (Oor-chin)

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commissioned by Lady Aileen McDonough